

September 8, 2021

Governor Doug Burgum
600 East Boulevard Avenue
Bismarck, ND 58505

Dear Governor Burgum,

Child care is a critical component of a thriving economy. Access to affordable child care is essential for parents to stay in the workforce. Many communities across North Dakota lack accessible and affordable child care to meet the demand for our state's working families. Fourteen counties in North Dakota meet less than 60 percent of the demand, and eight of these counties also experience high unemployment or poverty. Parents that need care during non-traditional hours find even fewer options. Only 3 percent of licensed programs are open during the weekends, 4 percent open during evenings, and 25 percent open during early morning hours. **For families that do find care, the cost is often out of reach. Child care is as expensive as in-state tuition at UND or NDSU. This means for full time infant care, families spend between \$7,600 and \$9,500 on average each year.** At the same time, child care businesses struggle to stay open and often must sacrifice worker pay to continue operating. Child care workers earn \$24,150 per year if working full time at the median wage of \$11.61, just barely hovering above poverty level for a family of three.

A better child care system is in reach for North Dakota. As the state spends \$76 million in relief money from the American Rescue Plan Act, we are urging policymakers to invest in solutions that balance the needs of working families and child care businesses. Our specific recommendations to improve child care in North Dakota include:

Access

- Prioritize federal child care funding to reach areas with the most significant need.
- Provide start-up or capacity grants to support new and existing providers with the ability to expand their capacity in areas with low child care supply.
- Expand Head Start capacity and Early Head Start-Child Care Partnerships, particularly in tribal communities operating tribal Head Start programs.

Quality

- Provide additional support to expand mental health resources for child care providers.
- Identify and remove barriers for participating in the quality rating and improvement system (QRIS).
- Align licensing and quality rating and improvement system (QRIS) requirements with Head Start.

Affordability

- Reach more families eligible for child care assistance.

- Expand a shared services model to make it easier for child care businesses to coordinate common services.
- Increase pay for child care workers and ensure professional development opportunities are within reach.

The undersigned organizations express our support for strengthening the child care system in North Dakota. Now is the time to invest in child care and build a system that works for parents, child care providers, and moves North Dakota's economy forward.

Signed,

North Dakota KIDS COUNT
North Dakota Department of Public Instruction
North Dakota United
North Dakota AFL-CIO
North Dakota Farmers Union
North Dakota's Building Trades Unions
North Dakota Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
North Dakota Rural Health Association
North Dakota Women's Network
American Civil Liberties Union of North Dakota
North Dakota Human Rights Coalition
Northern Valley Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Northern Plains United Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Missouri Slope Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Northern Chapter of the Missouri Slope Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO
Community Action Partnership of North Dakota
 Fargo-Moorhead Coalition to End Homelessness
High Plains Fair Housing Center
Family Voices North Dakota
Hunger Free North Dakota
Prevent Child Abuse North Dakota
North Dakota Children's Caucus
North Dakota Voices Network